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AUTHOR:

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ABUSES MUST BE SWEEP
OUT OF THE CHURCH

PLACE:

LONDON

DATE:

[1837]

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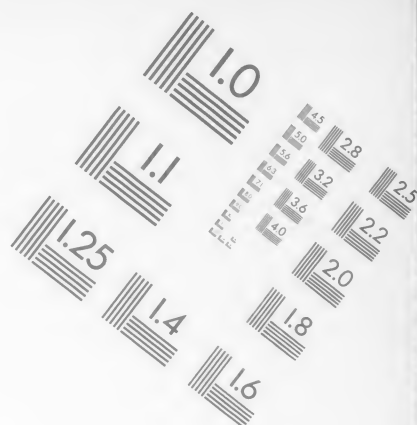
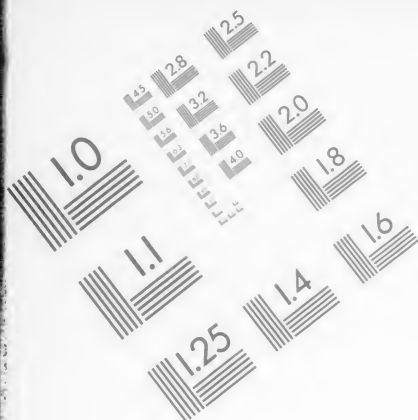
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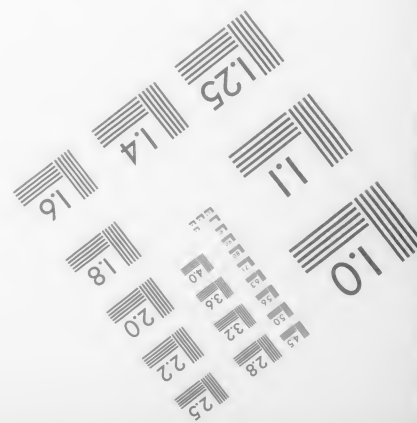
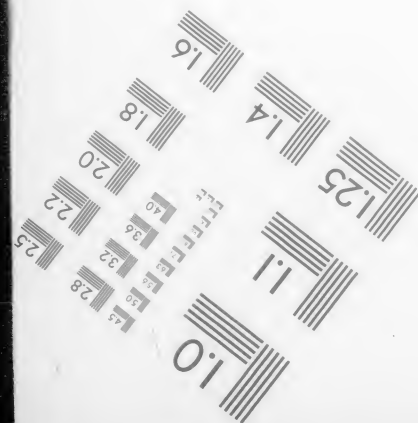
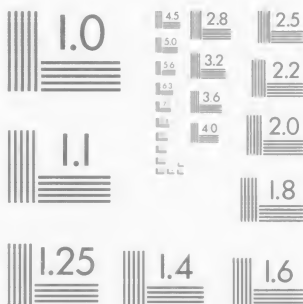
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To The Editor of The True Sun
With the Author's Respects
THE ABUSES

MUST BE

SWEPT OUT OF THE CHURCH:

A NECESSITY

URGED IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE

REPRESENTATIVES IN PARLIAMENT

OF

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY.

BY A MEMBER OF THE SENATE.

"THIS I'LL DEFEND."

LONDON:
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REPRESENTATIVES,

Are you not aroused by this appellation to a quick recollection of the obligations by which you, in whom are reposed the interests of a republic of learned men, are on all sides surrounded?—*on all sides*, I say advisedly; for, though the protection of our interests is but one gigantic duty, yet, Briareus-like, it hath a hundred hands.

Boldly I approach the closet-door of your reflections; for truth, however she may be driven to hide her diminished head, is innately bold—perplexed often, but never to be dissolved. She runs through the streets ragged and despised, but she has a resting-place at night, amid calm and holy dreams, which pampered luxury desires. The ill-favoured region of truth—

“A barren and detested vale, you see it is:
The tree, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
O’ercome with moss, and baleful misseltoe”—

but, if ever her turn to speak, now—now, surely, the faction-harassed people of this country are prepared to listen.

It may be called the curse of the days on which we are fallen that, between the two hosts of party-zeal, there is a dreary and uninviting space—a space which no multitude advances to occupy, and where no man is to be found but, now and then, a valorous champion for liberty or right, whose fate is to be gazed at with wonder, pity, or indifference, and then—to pass away forgotten. But, can there be no effort made to render this, instead of “a wall of separation,” a ground of conciliation between the two? Certainly, there can be: and it is the hope of all honest men that there will be, and this ere long, a strenuous application of energy and talent to the grandest of all human attainables—the pacification of prejudice by the assurance of honest purposes—the *winning* of partialities which cannot be *destroyed*.

Why then do I address you? You know your calling—You will have, during this Parliament, many, perhaps some special, opportunities wherein to serve us—You have already buckled on your armour. You will be present, doubtless, when the battle rages. The defenders of absolute, and the advocates of untried institutions are gathering; the intoxication of party, the syren-song of the enchantress Power, the shackles of family and connexion, the remembrance of ancestry, will be there; but, may I presume to exhort, be *ye* there. Holding in your own hands the authority committed to you, “quit yourselves like men.” The statesmen of old have earned our admiration or disgust, but they claim not our confidence. *PITT*, wrapped in his early shroud—how gloriously he sleeps!—sleeps on: *FOX*, with all his might, is a name: *BURKE*, *SHERIDAN*,—all of them, with all their glitter and renown, took to their graves along

with them their times; and it is *ye are the men* now.

Without doubt, the most serious of all the questions to be agitated is *The Church*. Bigots, of each persuasion, say that it is *Church or No Church*. Moderate men, wise men, Christian men, must concur that it is—or, rather, the object of their desires is—*THE CHURCH WITHOUT ABUSES*.

It needs hardly be said that this indicates the subject to which I now beg leave to draw your attention. I weave no apology—too insignificant to lay one, though I should weave it never so cunningly, on your tables: but, assured that candour is the best road—it is the nearest, surely—to every upright statesman’s notice, I am free to confess that, in assuming the honour of some connexion with the dignity of your office, it is my ambition to pour through this channel a stream of pure intention—unbiassed and (save to God) irresponsible sentiment—into some small portion of the public mind.

We are a Christian people: we *must* have a Gospel-church under the protection of the State, or remain the bye-word of the heathen. For it is not possible that, sects though there must ever be, we can go on harmoniously as a nation, and thus avert the taunt of being the *most religious and most divided* people in the world, until real and acknowledged *abuses* shall have been (or, at least, shall be in a way to be) *swept out of the Church*. We are, moreover, in an age big with the achievements of science—an age of wondrous inventions; and men’s minds will not more surely bear a physical relation to the advances thus made than *they* will not be deterred from enquiry;—they will—they do look into the principles of all systems; and

the best we can hope for, with reference to our religious system, from anything approaching to disregard or indifference, is that they will *dissent* from arrangements and be disgusted with offences which they have not the power to control.

But, as we are a Christian people, so the preponderance of sentiment must be on the side of Christian principles—I speak of things palpable,—not of doctrine, tenet, creed, or interpretation; but of discipline, practice, duty, and example; and we must as clearly have Christianity preferred to all the religions of deception and error as a Gospel-church under the protection of the State.

To come at once to the point,—If we have a church under such government, in such discipline, and supplied with such ministers as are in conformity with the divine institution of Christ,—the government exercising such authority, the discipline defined and regulated by such motives, and the ministers endowed with such commission, as may be clearly proved *analogous* to their correspondents in the same,—no religious man will doubt, for a moment, that we ought to rest satisfied and thankful. That we have this blessing above all blessings to an eminent extent may be unhesitatingly affirmed. That Christianity has a throne in England is a conviction which entwines itself around the heart, bidding it beat with grateful emotions towards the Father of lights. But, shall we, in fond devotion to antiquity, in a culpable love of rest with its kindred aversion from reformation, or in an unwarranted confidence in the One that is mighty, forget that with antiquity we look for rottenness and corruption;—that rest is no more necessarily the companion of prosperity—

“Should it be stagnant in its ample seat,
The sun would through it spread destructive heat”—

than reformation the child of folly;—and that there is a criminal confidence, as well as a laudable faith, in our sublunary affinity to the Maker?

Should temptation bid us linger in debate on the proposition conveyed in these last words, let us call to mind that God’s first favoured people experienced the loss of the grace in which they had stood—that, as a nation, they are dispersed as with a whirlwind—as a people, universally left to the hardness of their hearts. The Judge of Israel “fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died,” *not* before the messenger “made mention of the ark of God;” and the wife of his son, now a widow and all but a mother, “named the child I-chabod, saying, *the glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken!*”

There are, however, it may be said, in our present state of the Church of England, no abuses, certainly, which may be compared with the capital offences of that people; but there are some things, at all events,—you do not pretend to say that this state is as good as it might be—which may easily be made to pass from the corruption which is thrown over them to the life which slumbers—restlessly slumbers beneath.

“Methought I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more!”

The accumulated dust of an age may be swept away in an hour; and, though use and service—and, alas! neglect—have effaced the splendour of the cup, how readily may it be restored to its pristine glory! If any profit by the concealment of the mosaic be—

neath, or if fraud design to exchange the sullied gold for despicable brass, honest and religious men have yet but the one course to pursue. The *necessity* which impels them, tampers not with the advocates of dust or appropriation—the *abuses must be swept out of the Church*—the splendour of existing and inherent worth must be made to shine again!

I am a clergyman, proud in disclaiming all *party*, arrogant in the contempt which I bestow on all *names* by which various opinions are designated, and falling miserably short in obedience to the master whom *alone* I acknowledge. Shall I not be charged—what matter?—with ostentation when I add that, next to this *one master*, I reverence the Apostolical authority of the Church to which we belong; and, in adoring His goodness, would turn aside only to admire this—his workmanship, contemplating the *living fact* that “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ?” Yet, I come forward, and with the voice of one man declare that there are *abuses in the Church*, such as may easily, even without detriment to any private interest deserving consideration, *be swept out*—such as experience, not theory, has exposed to me—such as, though commonly overlooked, bring greatest scandal upon it—such as, the removal of which will create no revulsion of opinions—no ground of regret on the score of novelty—no heartburnings to stir up the feelings of pious Dissenters; but the reverse of all these.

There is a word in common parlance, the mention

of which will unfold the *abuse* which I mean to treat of in this letter. *CURATES*—and, from their eminent services in the maintenance of doctrine, discipline, ordinances, sacraments, the Church, and all those things which contribute most to the special objects of the Gospel, they stand, not undeservedly, first in public estimation—have long earned, in their patient forbearance from remonstrance, the neglect of their more wealthy brethren. But, as this designation points to the *cure of souls*, it is too generic for our purpose—we must have a specific term appropriate to the class, and advance our “*curates*” to the title of *stipendiary clergy*, leaving the other class of the *genus* in possession of their old name of *beneficed clergy*.

Now, let me entreat your attention. I have no private rancour, believe me, to gratify at the expense of your indulgence. The subject is not beneath the notice of the wisest Legislature—it is worthy the breathless anxiety of the greatest Christian people. Nor have I the old story of inadequate remuneration to inflict upon you; though that is a story which loses not by the telling.

What I complain of, is the gradual sinking of *Episcopalian* into *Presbyterian* principles—the cession, too general almost to allow the admission of exceptions, of the power of the *bishops* to the *priests*; and this sinking—this cession tends—to what? A sheer absurdity, in one point of view; an impious profanation, in the other—that is, either the paradox of *inequality amongst equals*, or the *unchristian domination of wealth*. We must treat of these separately.

First, *inequality amongst equals* exists in the assumed mastership of the beneficed over the stipendiary clergy; for the early admission to the priest-

hood renders the exception, which might be made in the case of *deacons*, nugatory. So that a man might almost say—"If we have, according to the Gospel, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons—the first only* in authority over the other two, and the second for the guidance and instruction of the third, well; but what mean these first, second, and third classes of *priests*? This, surely is a superinduction." But, I have to show you that it exists, and that its existence is mischievous.

It exists, almost universally. A young man is ordained a deacon. At the expiration of a year he may become a priest. For reasons, more cogent than becoming, it is generally his wish to obtain another curacy. In order to become fully authorized to serve in his new church, he obtains a licence from the bishop of the diocese, in which licence the bishop "assigns" to him his stipend, commanding at what instalments it shall be paid, and "requires" him to reside, (if this be a part of the introductory compact between him and the incumbent) in the parsonage house. Now, all this, I grant, is directly opposed to any undue authority on the part of the rector, or vicar, over his deputy, or assistant. But the practice is *wholly at variance* with the theory; and, consult any ten stipendiary clergymen, you will find nine of them unwilling to acknowledge that they have the power of acting as "ambassadors of Christ." The test, which is commonly applied, of preaching a probationary sermon; the rejection of candidates,

* They cannot delegate the episcopal power, properly so called, to presbyters, without giving them episcopal consecration. * *

* * There were no priests and anti-priests in opposition to one another, and therefore there could be no schism.—(Lesley.)

because they have large families; the presumptuous enquiry into doctrinal opinions; the requirement to abstain from taking pupils, or to submit to conditions other than, some subversive of, those imposed by the bishop,—these, things which for the most part may be argued to be even desirable, are proofs of the tone and temper in which the engagement is made and its consequences to be carried out. Then, upon any of those points of practice, in which there is a diversity of performance, the stipendiary must submit to the dictation of the beneficed, or they jar, if nothing worse. If, for instance, the latter hold the necessity of using the burial service, indiscriminately and without enquiry, in the case of infants having been born in the parish; the former must comply, at the sacrifice of his conscience, or the harmony of their compact will be disturbed. In fact, I know of no more fertile source of difference than the conscientious adherence of the one, mixed with the accommodating practice of the other, with regard to the rubrics of the various services of the Church.

The compact was called introductory above. So it is. As soon as ever the bishop's licence is obtained, (without this it is nothing) the incumbent who *nominated* disappears as a principal, and the "curate" becomes responsible *only to his diocesan*. Yet, to see how commonly, not only power to control, but ability to dismiss, is arrogated by the priest holding the benefice, must surely convince any one that our principles of Church Government are lapsing to Presbyterianism. Another consideration will place this truth in a very forcible light. Suppose the stipendiary clergyman to stand back upon his licence, and, for conscience' sake, to declare his determina-

tion not to submit to the dictation (I am not using inappropriate words, for any superiority in point of experience is as often as not on the side of the "curate") of one of his own order in the Church—what then? I believe the incumbent may forbid the functions, though, surely, he may not withhold the stipend, of his assistant, and thus render the position of the latter one of pain and humiliation—to such a degree that he will at last be driven to resign. The inevitable consequence of this will be extreme difficulty in obtaining another *nomination*; for the beneficed clergy, particularly those in one district, not unnaturally hang together, and (with sorrow be it said) have little sympathy with their stipendiary brethren. It is necessary, moreover, that three beneficed clergymen should subscribe to a knowledge of good life and doctrine, before a licence to another cure can be had; and this will not easily be accomplished, unless his late *employer* make *one*.

It is clear, I think, from this—the mildest view of the circumstances in which "Curates" are placed, that, practically, there is an *inequality amongst equals*. Let us proceed, therefore, to the more important consideration which remains—that *it is mischievous*.

However rightly we may insist upon the spiritual capacity of the Clergy, their temporal position will never be overlooked by the great mass of the laity. If the stipendiary curate be compelled, by poverty, —and

"Magnum pauperies opprobrium, jubet
Quidvis et facere et pati"—

by the wants of a family, by the desire to acquire respectability through permanence in one office, or by any other motive, to submit his conscience, or

even his conversation, to the will of the beneficed curate, or absentee, it will soon be seen. Nay, representations from parishioners to the one, of the doctrine, life, errors, or infirmities, of the other, of two equal clergymen will often be answered by formal enquiries; and this cannot fail to open their eyes. Hence, the (imagined) *hireling* is despised; his ministrations fail; his former enemies (and the more conscientious will often have most) abuse, in adversity, him whom they dared not assail in prosperity; even his friends begin to pity him; and he loses that peace which alone has supported him under all the trials and privations which fall to the lot of the stipendiary clergy, universally. This is highly mischievous. It weakens the attachment to the church, which the laity will always identify with the clergy, and tends to break the zeal of their pastors; than which two results combined nothing can more effectually war against the Establishment.

Secondly, *The unchristian domination of wealth*—who will deny its existence and operation among the inferior clergy?

We know that, in all temporal departments, wealth will always command influence; but it needs not be so among the inferior clergy—as I hope to show in the sequel of these arguments.

Though the "curates" are men who, in our populous parishes, live in humble lodgings, and, in our rural districts, board in farm-houses—in the event of the parsonage-house not being assigned to them; though a small room serves them for library, dining-room, and drawing-room; and the few books which they possess occupy the window-seat, the sofa, or the floor; though they are pale and young, or old

and thin, retired in habits, availing themselves gladly of the occasional invitation, visiting the poorest (if the incumbent reside and relieve him of some part) of the pastoral charge, and living like the honest artizan; though they have to support the appearance of gentlemen upon the incomes of stud-grooms, valets, or the hack-clerks of our ordinary merchants; though such are their acknowledged circumstances that they have no right to make these facts matter of complaint, and they are not advanced as such on this occasion; though, in fine, they are most of them by birth, all of them by education, gentlemen, without the means of giving alms to the poor,—there is no reason, earthly or divine, why the more wealthy clergymen should exercise dominion over them—why, being equals in that view which alone brings them in contact, they should have such uneven justice at the hands of their brethren in the priesthood. Prosperity brings pride; and is it for this reason that, while Wickliffe's poor preachers were venerated in their rags, and defended in their missionary exertions by the arms of their countrymen, the well-educated, pious, honourable-minded stipendiaries of this palmy age have not even the sympathy of their brethren? Is it the privilege of the sacred office that a man is to be responsible to his fellow-sinners in the ministry who are his equals in power and authority; and is it among the ministers of Christ only that power is arrogated for the purpose of oppression? In our glorious Reformation, did we lose that grand and good principle which constituted the priest under no obedience to the priest, and made the bishop, as he alone must be now, the OVERSEER of the "inferior clergy?" Our old

names will tell us that these "times are out of joint." What is an Arch-deacon? An officer appointed to *assist the Bishop* in the government of his diocese. But they dared not give *him* even a title which should convey any authority over the *priesthood*. Nay, we hold it to be not so absurd for a patron to exercise any after-influence over the man of his choice and nomination—influence of such a sort as forcibly to cramp his sacred functions, or interfere with his private life,—as for the beneficed priest to assume, any other but a parochial *precedence*, over the stipendiary priest who has been licensed by the Bishop to assist in, or supersede him in, his cure. And yet, our modern incumbents talk of *my curate*, and *your curate*, and, with shocking boasting, of having *removed* this and that curate, as if they were the *owners*, instead of merely the *tenants*, of the benefices of the Church.

It is in vain to say that this arrogance is tacitly permitted to them by the Bishops—that cannot be—no power can sanction an absurdity.

"'Tis not possible for any man in his wits, though never so much addicted to paradoxes, to believe otherwise but that the whole is greater than the part; that contradictions cannot be both true; that three and three make six; that four is more than three."*

It is in vain to ascribe such sentiments as these to the morbid sensibilities of poverty, or the chagrin of disappointment. I am prepared for such easy imputations; and, though no man shall surpass me in attachment to the Church of England *as by law established*, I am prepared for the sweeping condem-

* Wilkins.

nation of the incumbents of *nearly* all the parishes in England. Because I advocate principle, not party, the political enemy to the Church will complain that I am orthodox, and perhaps burn the pamphlet; while the Metropolitan Conservative Journalists will denounce it as ridiculous and absurd, because I acknowledge *abuses* in that Establishment of which I am much more conservative than they—*ipse medius et neutrius partis*,—I know the rest.

It is in vain to say that the whole grievance amounts to nothing. It amounts to all which may be considered vital to the interests of the Church—the *good-will of the people*. The good people of England love nothing more than the maintenance of legitimate dignities and authorities—nothing less than the arbitrary assumption of them. The Dissenter is confirmed in his dissent, the infidel in his cold contempt, the atheist in his sullen hatred, by the subjection to which they see one part submitted to the other part of the equal and inferior clergy—equal one to another, inferior to their Bishop; but they would *all* approve, and—I speak not without experience—many would join, under the visible existence and exertion of *Episcopal power*. Men love good kings, and endure bad ones; but they hate usurpers, for their very names' sake: they respect the magistrate, but they would cuff the ruffian who takes the law in his own hands.

But, why do not the working clergy come forward, as one man, and, if this be really the case, make one loud representation of their wrongs? For many reasons:—

1st, Because they are pledged to Christianity, and

the doctrines of their faith enjoin patience in tribulation, joy in suffering, and hope in affliction.

2d, Because, individually, they know that loss, not gain, is the fruit of making oneself conspicuous.

3d, Because they are aware that some would always remain out of the league, and thus defeat the beneficial results of it to themselves.

4th, Because they rely upon higher power than human, and are not easily induced, therefore, to make any appeal to human justice or generosity.

5th, Besides many others, because, as the law stands, they are already in subjection, each to the beneficed clergy of his neighbourhood, sufficiently to render their preferment from one cure to another next to an impossibility if they display any tendencies to what is called *the movement*.

I cannot occupy your time longer with such allegations; for no Englishman can have failed to perceive that a petty tyranny—a *lording-it-over*—a mastery—a power—exists in spiritual places, where no such authority is constitutional, or according to scripture, or favourable to the cause of the Church, or in behalf of the interests of Christianity.

The fact, that where the *beneficed* curates alone do the work of the Church is only in some small parishes in rural districts, coupled with the consideration that in our populous towns, collectively, certainly more than half is done by the *stipendiary* curates, must be decisive of the eminent utility of these; and no one ever yet disputed their respectability in the account of piety and learning. Presuming, then, that the discipline of the Church is, in any degree, amenable to the acts of the legislative assembly, can any

adequate honest reason be given why this portion of the sacred ministry should be allowed to labour under the thralldom of their equals—*any* superiority being visible only in regard to this world's goods?

But, the remedy. If I have proved the existence of an evil, it follows, from what has been advanced, that it is not only a *mischievous*, but an unnecessary one. Surely, then, it is removeable.

Let power be lodged in them to whom it belongs, and in them only. The bishops are our ecclesiastical princes—the King is their *sovereign prince* and protector. If any man think this too much power for the prelates of the Church, our own poet shall let him know that time *was* when kings might be considered raised by an elevation to the prelacy.

“Hear him but reason in divinity,

And, all-admiring, with an inward wish

You would desire the king were made a prelate.”

Our bishops live in palaces—such is the excellence of the glory which already distinguishes the religion of Christ. To their authority scripture and reason command obedience. If the *priest* be permitted to nominate his substitute or assistant, there his power must determine. Beyond this, if not here even, we enter on the region of Presbyterianism, and that is not the religion of the Church of England. We must have bishops (call them apostles, if you will), to be in conformity with the gospel; and to have them, while their power is transferred to inferior hands, in a community which embraces but three (virtually but *two*) classes,* is a mockery—for it would pretend to be a copy—of our divine original.

* All deacons soon become priests, but all priests cannot ever become bishops.

I trust I have taken higher ground than the question of remuneration; but this, it will be perceived, would be settled also, were the power really in its proper seat. Laws are already in existence; but, it must be lamented while it is confessed, they are not in operation,—because the considerations which belong to what is called *real* property are allowed to impinge upon the sacred life-interest which, at the most, is invested in spiritual benefices—everything is done as if the temporalities of *the Church* were the real property of successive generations of men who only hold them during a small portion (commonly) of their lives. The mal-administration of good laws is even more to be deprecated than the operation of bad ones—here we have the evil before our eyes; there it steals up behind our backs.

I shall only trespass upon your patience while I apologize for being anonymous. I know not what is to be gained to any one by the publication of an obscure name: but I apprehend what may be lost. Yet, should it appear desirable in any future letters I may write upon this great subject, neither the loss of my little all, nor the temporary drawing-away of false friends, nor the altered countenance of real ones—not any earthly consideration shall induce me to withhold what may be thought the least surety in devoting myself, my talents, and my time, to a cause which I have learned by experience and mature reflection to consider sacred.

I have the honour to be, &c. &c.

A MEMBER OF THE SENATE.

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